

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002243

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/06/2012

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SUBJECT: MODERATES IN PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP UNEASY ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS IN AFTERMATH OF ISRAELI OFFENSIVE

Classified By: CDA Gerg Berry, per 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: In the aftermath of Israel's Operation Defensive Shield, the mood among even moderate factions in Amman's Wihdat refugee camp is suspicious and uneasy about Israeli and U.S. intentions. In a May 1 meeting with emboffs, Palestinian notables from Wihdat questioned U.S. "protection" of Israel as evidenced by cancellation of the UN's Jenin fact-finding mission; questioned stated U.S. support for the creation of a Palestinian state; and warned that the recent Israeli offensive would lead to greater political extremism within the West Bank and Jordan. The notables believe the only way to repair the damage of the last few months is to make dramatic progress toward the creation of a Palestinian state. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C) Refcoord and poloff met on May 1 with former member of Parliament Mohamed al-Kuz and Palestinian notables from Wihdat refugee camp. Wihdat, located within and indistinguishable from Amman's poorer eastern neighborhoods, is one of Jordan's largest and most politically active Palestinian refugee camps. It also has been the scene of some of the more violent demonstrations in recent weeks. Al-Kuz and the notables who accompanied him represent the most moderate faction among Jordan's Palestinian refugee camps: those who embrace a two-state solution and fully support the Jordanian regime and its pro-U.S. policies.

DISAPPOINTMENT IN U.S. "PROTECTION" OF ISRAEL FOLLOWING JENIN "CRIMES"

¶3. (C) As soon as the pleasantries were out of the way, a clearly distressed notable began questioning emboffs about the UN's decision to cancel the fact-finding mission to Jenin refugee camp. Somberly telling emboffs that his own relative had personally witnessed the IDF loading Palestinian corpses into trucks and "taking them to an Israeli crocodile farm within the West Bank," the notable wanted to know why the U.S. was "protecting" Israel. No other army in the world, he told emboffs, would be allowed to get away with the "crimes" committed in Jenin refugee camp. (Note: ConGen Jerusalem confirms that there is, in fact, a crocodile farm in the West Bank. The notable's story might not seem outlandish to a Palestinian familiar with the West Bank.)

QUESTIONING THE DETAILS OF U.S. VISION

¶4. (C) The notables questioned emboffs extensively about the U.S. vision of two states -- Israel and Palestine -- living side-by-side in peace and security. Explaining that they believed the U.S. had given an implicit "green light" for Israeli destruction of PA facilities in the West Bank, the notables wondered whether U.S. support for a Palestinian state extended only to Gaza. And if a Palestinian state were limited to Gaza, they asked, did the U.S. support a federation of the West Bank with Jordan? The notables were also concerned about the purpose of a new international peace conference. Hadn't the Madrid conference created an appropriate framework? And if a new conference were convened, the notables asked, would the international community absolve Israel of its responsibilities under the Oslo process? The notables asked emboffs how Palestinians could ever believe Israel would be held accountable to its agreements, if the international community "gave up" on Oslo.

¶5. (C) Given the widespread damage inflicted by the IDF in the West Bank, the notables also wondered how anyone could realistically expect peace in the immediate aftermath of Operation Defensive Shield. Stressing repeatedly that they themselves did not condone violence, the notables warned that Palestinian humiliation and suffering of the last month will result in "thousands" more suicide bombers. Only the creation of a Palestinian state will alleviate tensions.

NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS FOR JORDANIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

¶6. (C) The Wihdat camp leadership fears that the Israeli offensive will lead to greater popular support for political extremism within Jordan. Pointing to the Muslim

Brotherhood's "sweeping" victory in late April's Engineering Association elections, Al-Kuz told emboffs that many people now believe the MB was right to reject the Oslo process. After watching weeks of destruction in the West Bank, Jordanians could only believe that engagement with Israel would bring "ruin" to the Palestinians. The only possible solution to turn Jordanians away from extremism would be the immediate creation of the state of Palestine. Absent such a move, Al-Kuz believes King Abdullah will have no choice but to postpone Jordan's upcoming but still unscheduled parliamentary elections in order to prevent an MB victory. Al-Kuz noted that such a decision would be in full accord with Jordan's constitution and likely greeted with relief by political moderates like himself. He predicted that the King would call the former Parliament back into session.

SUPPORT FOR MAINTAINING TIES WITH ISRAEL

17. (C) Al-Kuz and the notables expressed strong support for the GOJ's decision to maintain ties with Israel. Although they acknowledged that there is great popular demand for a complete break in relations, the notables said relations with Israel are necessary to provide a "lifeline" to the Palestinian people. Through its relations with Israel and subsequent ability to funnel Arab aid to the West Bank, Jordan is the "savior" of the Palestinian people.

WIHDAT SADDENED; CALM FOR NOW

18. (C) Echoing comments made by sources from other camps, the notables described the mood in Wihdat as very sad. They said "everyone" has had a relative killed, arrested, or left homeless during the recent incursions. Although Wihdat had been the scene of some of the most violent confrontations between demonstrators and police, the notables believe only an extreme Israeli action, such as an invasion of Gaza, would trigger renewed violence within the camp.

COMMENT

19. (C) Al-Kuz and the notables from Wihdat represent the most moderate thinking among Jordan's Palestinian refugee camps. Although they still strongly support a two-state solution, their skepticism over the details and U.S. willingness to pressure Israel to meet its obligations, reveals an important change in the mood of moderates following Israeli incursions into the West Bank. Absent dramatic progress toward the creation of a Palestinian state -- a Palestinian state politically acceptable to Palestinians -- their pro-regime and pro-U.S. stance may be hard to maintain.

BERRY